Defensible decision making: children and families focused case study

Guidance Notes

This case study has been developed by Lorna Peltell, Team Manager Nottinghamshire County Council. The aim is that this be used in conjunction with the Defensible decision making slides to reinforce and develop your learning. The case study is in two parts:

1. 3 stage case study
2. Version of the case study with facilitator’s notes in red.

These materials are designed to be used flexibly and what follows is only suggestions: feel free to use them in the best way to support you/your team’s learning. While we have suggested using these as a group exercise, you could also adapt the case study to be an individual reflective exercise

Suggested Group work activity for team meeting, away day, peer group: identify a facilitator for the exercise. This could be a manager or senior practitioner for example. It should be someone who feels confident to lead discussions and ‘draw the group out’. Print out enough copies of the case study: a top tip is to print one sided, so you do not give out more than one stage at a time! We recommend that you allow about 30 mins in total for the exercise.

1. Split the group into manageable sub groups. Suggested 3-6 people per group. If your team is small (say less than 9), you may be able to do this as a whole group discussion.
2. Hand out stage 1 of the case study and ask groups to answer the questions. Allow about 7 mins per stage.
3. Get feedback from the groups after each stage, using the facilitator’s notes as discussion points.
4. Repeat for the remaining two stages
5. At the end: discuss
6. Referral from school, Abi who is 4 years old and recently started school with them. Sometimes Abi is unkempt, hungry and not always in full school uniform. School reports having little contact with mother as the neighbours bring her to school who also have children in the school. There is no previous history of social care involvement.

Who would you want to talk to and why? What further information would you want to gather and why? What questions do you have?

How would you record this and why?

What would you next steps be and why?

What might the problems be in making a ‘rational’ decision and what might affect your analysis of this information?

Is your decision defensible? Yes/no? why?

Write your rational based on your decision.

It would be helpful to have a further conversation with school to first determine what they have done to address their concerns and how long these concerns have been going on for.

You’d need to have a conversation with mother if possible before other agencies could be spoken to as consent would need to be gained. However if contact was not possible a decision would have to be made without speaking with mother or anyone else due to meeting timescales for referrals.

There are policies about case recording , things should be recorded within 3 days when child protection procedures are not initiated however and where possible they should be completed as soon as possible. You know the saying ‘if it’s not recorded it didn’t happen’ .

Given there is no previous social care involvement id want to check if Abi had lived elsewhere and could there be previous social care history in another Local authority.

Given the information at this stage it may be appropriate that a decision on No further action with school completing an Early help assessment form and holding a team around the child or making an early help referral to the family service. We are making a decision based on the information we know at this current time and based upon our previous experiences and knowledge of similar cases which may affect how we analysis the information.

1. Further concerns are raised from the GP. Health staff raised concern that Abi was rarely seen by a health visitor prior to starting school and an old case recording form a visit completed when she was 2 years old logs some concerns about home conditions.

Who would you want to talk to and why? What further information would you want to gather and why? What questions do you have?

How would you record this and why?

What would you next steps be and why?

What might the problems be in making a ‘rational’ decision and what might affect your analysis of this information?

Is your decision defensible? Yes/no? why?

Write your rational based on your decision.

This information potentially raised the concern level to suggest a concern about home conditions that is impacting upon Abi’s presentation.

In terms of contact with the health visitor, this is not a legal requirement and parent do have right to refuse the health visiting service and therefore would not automatically become a safeguarding issue. Equally health service have not previously raised a referral at the time suggesting no safeguarding concerns.

Again we are making a decision based on the information we know at this time, we can only rationalise our decision making based on known information, our experience and knowledge and threshold guidance from our local authority. We may speak with mother who may giving us no further information than we already know.

1. Family support worker completes an announced home visit to the family home where she is met by Susan - Mother. She is met by an unpleasant smell and the home is extremely cluttered. She discovers that Susan has physical disabilities, she is in chronic pain and incontinent. She also informs that she has diagnosis of personality disorder and reports a recent visit from an adult social care field worker who was completing as assessment on her. She informed that she plans to get daily support from this assessment of a care worker who will complete her housework and get her up and dressed in a morning and cook all her meals as she reports unable to do any of this.

What factors and risk now need to be considered and why?

Would this information have changed any of your previous decisions and why?

What would your next steps be and why?

Who would want to talk to and why?

What factors are impacting upon your decision making ?

What might the problems be in making a ‘rational’ decision and what might affect your analysis of this information?

Is your decision defensible? Yes/no? why?

Whats makes the situation change here , if we’d have known this at stage one how may this have changed our decisions? Does that mean our decisions made at that time were wrong?

With the addition of mothers mental and physical health needs this would change the threshold immediately to suggest a s17 assessment was needed from the outset. But this doesn’t mean our decisions were wrong, we made a decision based on the information we had at the time and in weighting all this up we made a defensible decision. It is important to rationalise how we came to the decision we made , ‘ show your working out’, so if things change later down the line when more information becomes available to us it’s clear that considerations were made to different options and how you came to such a conclusion.